

*Remarks for the
Kick-off of the New Year of Americorps
September 24, 2002*

Good afternoon. Dr. Clark, Dr. Johnson, thank you for being here today.

I want to say something to all of you here today who are serving your state and your nation through Americorps and Learn & Serve America. On behalf of the people of this state, I simply want to say “thank you” – thanks for the commitment, the dedication and the energy you bring to your work.

Mahatma Gandhi once said that the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others. Those are wise words from a wise man – and timeless words whose message still rings true.

The work each of us does – from the soup kitchens to the classrooms to the governor’s office – has an impact on those around us. I believe we all share a common mission, and that is to do our best to improve the lives of those who need our help.

It's a mission that goes back to the earliest times of history. One of the most basic teachings of the Bible – one of the Ten Commandments – calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

To some extent, I think the events of the past year have changed the way we look out for each other. As a nation, we are faced with new and disturbing challenges in the war on terrorism. And, as a state, we have obstacles that threaten our best use of resources to help our people.

How we respond to those challenges and those obstacles is an indicator of our direction as a society. Each of us is here today because we are committed to responding in a manner that demonstrates service and love of neighbor.

It is a commitment we take seriously, and Americorps is a visible reminder of that commitment. Last year, more than 1,700 individuals served with Americorps in communities around our state. Over 3,000 Mississippians qualified for education awards through Americorps to help with college or student loans.

Through Learn & Serve America, nearly 40,000 students in our state are learning the value of service to their peers and their communities. Program directors in this initiative are helping shape the next generation of volunteers.

Today, we're here to commit ourselves again to the values, the hope and the service that makes our state and our nation great.

We will base that commitment on the National Service Pledge, and I would ask you to now raise your right hand and repeat after me:

I will get things done for America (pause)

*To make our people safer, smarter and healthier
(pause).*

*I will bring Americans together to
Strengthen our communities (pause).*

Faced with apathy, I will take action (pause).

*Faced with conflict, I will seek common ground
(pause).*

Faced with adversity, I will persevere (pause).

*I will carry this commitment with me
This year and beyond (pause).*

*I am a National Service member, and
I am going to get things done!*

Congratulations to you all, and thank you for the
service you bring to Mississippi.